Portrayals of a Legend:
How Euro-Americans Have Manipulated Pocahontas' Image

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Pocahontas has been a legendary figure in American history since before the nation's existence. Children learn that Pocahontas defied her people to save the life of John Smith, the man she loved. The perpetuation of this myth shows no signs of slowing down since Disney's 1995 release of the animated film *Pocahontas*. From the seventeenth century through today, images of Pocahontas have served as propaganda for white Europeans and Americans. Her portrait was used to show that the suppression and conversion of Native Americans was not only possible, but beneficial to the natives. Pocahontas' image was also used to sell Virginia tobacco products, as her likeness added historical value to the product. These visual representations undermine the young woman's courage in trying to bring peace between two vastly different nations. Pocahontas was certainly a tenacious woman in the early seventeenth century; however, the reproduction of her image has been manipulated to serve multiple white Euro-American agendas.

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Introduction

> *I hear the steady pounding of hands on drums while the men chant rhythmically. A distant yell rings through the towering trees. The chant becomes as furious as my heartbeat as I force my tiring feet to move faster through the brush, legs pumping stronger than ever before. Over a stream, past a fallen tree, through leaves, branches, earth. I close the distance to the crowd of people, gaining speed as I see my father holding a club overhead a figure lying on the ground. "No!" I cry as I throw my arms out and slide toward John. I land with my body covering his head and look up at my aghast father. "I love him, father. Don't kill him." To my relief, my father lowers his club.* (Vaught 1)

As this fictional scene illustrates, this is how a white American might envision the story of Pocahontas, the legendary Native American princess who was supposedly responsible for saving the life of Captain John Smith. Children today might remember from bedtime stories that Pocahontas was a beautiful Native American woman who fell in love with a white man when his people sailed to the enchanting New World. However, the stories we are told as children are usually ones with added fantasy, romanticism, and mystery. In reality, Pocahontas was only a young girl when Smith was nearly killed by her Powhatan tribe, if the incident even occurred at all.

In the years since her death, Pocahontas has been gradually established as an historical figure who helped Europeans established the modern United States. Americans will forever be encouraged to remember her heroic actions while trying to create peace between her people and the newly arrived English. However, because she is such an iconic figure, it is difficult to find accurate portrayals of Pocahontas as the seventeenth century Algonquin woman she must have been. Throughout U.S. history, images of the Powhatan looking more European than Native

American have been used for propaganda purposes. From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, images of Pocahontas as a stereotypical "Indian" abounded, and artists framed her with objects believed to be inherently "Indian," such as teepees, feathers, and war paint. Several Virginia tobacco companies used images of Pocahontas in their nineteenth century advertisements, connecting her to tobacco's history in America. Today, the most utilized image of Pocahontas is that from Disney's 1995 animated film *Pocahontas*, which did nothing to correct the erroneous story of Pocahontas' life that has been continually reproduced since the early seventeenth century. For four centuries, Pocahontas' image has been used to illustrate Native American cooperation with white colonists and to promote Euro-American political and economic ventures.

Historical Background

To evaluate how Pocahontas' image has been used throughout history, it is important to understand the details of her life with as much accuracy as possible. Pocahontas, also known as Matoaka, was born around 1595 to an Algonquin woman and Chief Powhatan. Powhatan was the leader of the Powhatan Confederacy of 32 Algonquin-speaking nations living in modern day eastern Virginia. Pocahontas was about eleven years old when the John Smith and his English companions landed in Virginia in 1607. Smith wrote about his encounter with Pocahontas several years after it occurred. He claims he was taken captive in December of 1607, and some days later placed on flat stones in front of a large crowd of Native Americans. As men with clubs prepared to kill Smith, he wrote, "Pocahontas the King's dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death" (qtd. in Morenus). According to Smith, Powhatan stopped the execution and two days later accepted Smith as a friend. Smith used Pocahontas to illustrate that a native girl was willing to

save his life, even though her own father, the Chief, sentenced him to death. Smith highlights the barbarity of the Powhatan men, while also showing the compassionate nature of Pocahontas.

Historians, researchers, and Native Americans disagree with each other and Smith on the validity of his story. Some think the incident was entirely made up, as Smith failed to write about it until 1624, well after Pocahontas died and had become widely known. Chief Roy Crazy Horse, leader of the Powhatan Renape Nation from 1972 until his death in 2004, wrote, "It was but one of three reported by the pretentious Smith that he was saved from death by a prominent woman" (qtd. in "The Pocahontas Myth"). Others believe that Smith misinterpreted the events of 1607 as his execution, when in reality he may have unknowingly played a role in a Powhatan ritual that adopted Smith into the tribe as a symbolic son to the chief. Even so, it is extremely unrealistic that the young Pocahontas saved 28-year-old Smith because of romantic feelings. Historian David Silverman of George Washington University contends that the two most likely shared a political relationship as allies in Native American–English relations. During an interview with a producer of the PBS Nova TV episode about Pocahontas' life, Silverman says, "We know that she accompanied and perhaps even headed up Indian delegations to the English to bring them food and eventually to free Indian captives being held at Jamestown fort" (qtd. in "John Smith's Bold Endeavor"). Whether distorted truth or absolute fiction, Smith's story forever lives on as Pocahontas' legendary role in American history.

As Silverman suggests, Pocahontas' interaction with the English does not end with her encounter with Smith. In fact, the English credit Pocahontas with keeping them from starving their first winter at Jamestown by regularly bringing them food. Smith wrote in his book *Generall Historie of Virginia*, published in 1624, "Now every once in four or five days, Pocahontas with her attendants, brought him [Smith] so much provision, that saved many of their

lives, that else for all this had starved with hunger" (qtd. in Morenus). Pocahontas served as an ambassador for her father and traded food and furs for hatchets and other European goods. Smith claimed that in 1609 Pocahontas warned him of a Powhatan attack in the middle of warfare over food trade, which allowed the English to retreat safely ("John Smith's Bold Endeavor"). However, this too could have been a political move by Chief Powhatan, sending the foreigners a warning that they could attack if they chose to.

As Pocahontas matured, she continued to be used by her father and the English. In 1613, Captain Samuel Argall kidnapped Pocahontas while she was visiting the English. Captain Argall wanted to trade the girl for stolen arms and goods and English prisoners. Chief Powhatan only sent part of the ransom, so Pocahontas was not released. While in captivity, 28-year-old widower John Rolfe took an interest in Pocahontas. Rolfe was instrumental in growing a Spanish strain of tobacco in the New World, which the Europeans preferred over the Native American's more bitter tobacco. Pocahontas agreed to marry Rolfe as a condition of her release. She converted to Christianity and was baptized, given the name Rebecca. Pocahontas and Rolfe married in 1614 and had a son, Thomas, a year later. The Rolfe's marriage helped establish "an uneasy truce between the Powhatan and English peoples in early Virginia" (Silverman, qtd. in "John Smith's Bold Endeavor"). However, the union did little to cement Native American–Colonist relations in the long run.

In 1616 the Rolfe family traveled to England, where Pocahontas met the King and Queen. Chief Roy Crazy Horse wrote that while in England, "The Virginia Company of London used her [Pocahontas] in their propaganda campaign to support the colony" (qtd. in "The Pocahontas Myth"). The Powhatan Museum of Indigenous Arts and Culture website also notes that Pocahontas was used as a "celebrity" for the Virginia Company "in an attempt to raise badly

needed funds for the capitalist venture that was the foundation of the newly formed colony in Virginia" ("Pocahontas"). The Rolfes stayed in England for one year before starting back to Virginia. On the return trip, the ship was forced to stop in Gravesend, England because Pocahontas fell ill. She died a few days later at the age of 21. Chief Powhatan died one year after Pocahontas, and relations with the English began to break down, forever ceasing any harmony the young Native American tried to establish between the two peoples. Pocahontas' legacy was, therefore, not immediately of reconciliation; however, her image continued to be used for political and economic purposes throughout history.

Algonquin Women in the Early Sixteenth Century

Because accurate portrayals of Pocahontas are difficult to find, it is necessary to examine the historical appearance of Algonquin women. Women in the costal plain region of Virginia in which Pocahontas lived had brown skin and black hair. They were shorter than their male counterparts, but physically strong because of their daily labor-intense duties. It was not uncommon for women to have tattoos. Women wore their hair loose or in long braids. Before reaching the age of puberty, girls would have shaved heads minus a braided strand in the back. Before entering puberty, girls wore no clothing and once they reached age twelve or thirteen, they wore knee length fringed skirts

John White, 1585

and deerskin moccasins. Women typically did not wear shirts during warm weather, but wore cloaks made of feathers in the winter. They wore leggings when gathering food in the woods. Jewelry was common among the Powhatan. Necklaces, bracelets, and earrings were made out of pearl, copper, shell, bone, and animal teeth.

Ten years before Pocahontas was born, John White was part of an English expedition "to an area similar to Powhatan's territory" ("Pocahontas"). White painted watercolors of Algonquin females the men encountered in 1585. He draws the shirtless women with brown skin, dark hair, full lips, and face and body tattoos. It is possible that these images are more accurate representations of what Pocahontas and her fellow Powhatan women looked like in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. White's portrayal of Algonquin women corresponds to the limited historical data available about Pocahontas' physical appearance.

Representations from 1616-1800

Despite images like those of White, it remains difficult to know exactly what Pocahontas looked like, as there was only one image of her rendered from real life. "Matoaka als Rebecca" is an engraving produced in 1616 by Dutchman Simon van de Passe while Pocahontas was visiting England. The image was created when the Native American was twenty-one years old, and it is impossible to say what liberties de Passe took while engraving it. Commissioned by the Virginia Company, the engraving depicts Pocahontas dressed in European attire, wearing a tall hat and an elaborate dress. The image is displayed on the PBS website for the Nova episode about the life of Pocahontas.

Simon van de Passe, "Matoaka als Rebecca," 1616

The site says, "It was the first of many depictions of Pocahontas intended to demonstrate that a Native American could adopt the demeanor of a 'civilized' European" ("Images of a Legend"). Her facial features are sharp and rigid, as is her hand and body. She is sitting straight up, holding her arm at an unwavering angle. These formal poses make the Powhatan appear royal, furthering the European idea that she was an Indian princess. Unfortunately, there are no known images made of Pocahontas in her natural clothing during her life in Virginia, so her image in this setting remains mysterious and up to interpretation.

An oil painting most likely from the 1700s by an unknown English artist seems to have been taken from de Passe's engraving. Referred to as the "Booton Hall Portrait," this image shows Pocahontas in the same attire and holding the same feather as in the seventeenth century engraving. Unlike de Passe's engraving, however, the painting is a color image. The painting shows the soft, round features of a woman who looks much more English than Powhatan. The artist gave Pocahontas pale skin and light brown hair. Her hand is more plump and appears softer and not as bony, and her facial features are also softer and less pronounced. She does not have the high, hollow cheekbones or dimpled chin that de Passe gave her in the engraving. The unknown English artist represents Pocahontas in a distinctly European manner, more so than de Passe, giving viewers the impression that white women's features are superior to those of the native women of America. He removes all traces of visual Native American heritage to show his audience that

Unknown English artist, "Booton Hall Portrait," likely 1700s

Pocahontas was able to leave her old life behind when converting to Christianity and marrying a European.

The engraving "King Powhatan Comands C. Smith to be Slayne" was made in 1624 by Robert Vaughan and published in John Smith's book *Generall Historie*. This engraving is thought to be the first depiction of this now iconic scene representing Smith's story that Pocahontas saved his life against the wishes of her father. Pocahontas is difficult to see in this image because her back is turned to the viewer as she kneels over John Smith, who is flanked by men with clubs and spears. She wears only a loin cloth and is smaller than the other figures in the engraving. This makes Pocahontas look like a young child, as she historically was when this event took place. The young girl is not the focal point of the image, which changes in later representations. Instead, the engraving highlights the barbarity of the Native Americans. Two young men hold tomahawks and one points a bow and arrow over a prostrate John Smith. A large audience witnesses the event as a fire rages nearby.

Robert Vaughan, "King Powhatan Comands C. Smith to be Slayne," 1624

There are few representations of Pocahontas from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as this time is characterized by the first visual depictions of the Native American. The two portraits show the woman in proper English attire, which serve to show how easily Native Americans can be Europeanized. Vaughan's 1624 engraving of Smith's near-death experience highlights the barbarity of natives who are willing to kill Englishmen. This in turns gives

justification for English colonization of Native Americans.

Representations from 1800-1900

Portraits of Pocahontas

Most visual representations I examined from the nineteenth century show Pocahontas as a fairly plump young woman (see Appendix I, images 1-10). Her face is rounded, as are her arms and hands. The authors of these images do not make Pocahontas physically strong. In fact, she looks like she should be waited on by servants, not tanning hides and carrying firewood. Pocahontas would have been a strong young woman because of the physical work she would have been doing each day. However, many portraits depict the Powhatan as a gentle and fragile girl.

Several portraits of Pocahontas created in the mid-nineteenth century show her in nonnative clothing and settings (see Appendix I, images 1-3). She is painted wearing flowing dresses made of green, red, and white cloth, with low necklines and long, loose sleeves. The garments are nothing like the deer skin skirts that Powhatan women truly wore in the seventeenth century, and the images fail to show Pocahontas in her Virginia homeland. Instead, the backgrounds are plain and blurred, as if she is posing for the artist in a studio. These images altogether remove Pocahontas from her own culture.

These three portraits were created in the early 1840s and 50s, shortly after the Indian Removal Act was signed by President Jackson. They depict a civilized Pocahontas who is reserved and well mannered in her non-threatening European clothing. Because there are no backgrounds in the portraits, we cannot place Pocahontas in a specific setting, so viewers can gather that she was not a danger to white Americans, which her role in history also tells us. During a time of struggle between the government and Native Americans, the artists are

reminding the public of a figure who stood for peace and civility among the two groups. Pocahontas is perfectly content conforming to the style of a white woman.

In many nineteenth century depictions, artists did not give Pocahontas her naturally dark skin, as they opted for a more fair skin tone (see Appendix I, images 1-3, 5-8, 10, 12). This is also a tool artists used to make the Native American look less foreign. By giving her pale skin, viewers are more inclined to connect with her and accept Pocahontas as someone worth paying attention to. During this time, it was important that she did not appear excessively Native American, as most other Americans would not have appreciated artwork representing a group they wanted relocated. Therefore, by giving Pocahontas lighter skin, the artists have neutralized her nativeness.

Nonetheless, a few portraits of the period depict Pocahontas in more stereotypical Native American attire (see Appendix I, images 4-8). She is dressed in garments that do not cover both shoulders and are detailed with fringe and beading. Yet, the material remains a cloth fabric rather than deer skin. Pocahontas wears some jewelry, typically a necklace or two and several bracelets in one image. Many artists drew feathers in her hair and around her arm, one gave the Powhatan woman a crown of flowers and a fur shawl, and in another she holds a pipe adorned with feathers.

Many nineteenth century portraits also depict Pocahontas in wooded and mountainous areas (see Appendix I, images 4-7). Trees, rocks, mountains, and birds are drawn around her. One image shows two other Native Americans in a canoe on a river behind the girl. A sculpture of Pocahontas created by Joseph Mozier circa 1854 shows a deer peacefully lying at her feet, rubbing against her leg (see Appendix I, image 9). Within these images, the artists placed objects typically associated with Native Americans, such as feathers, pipes, deer and canoes. This results

in representations of Pocahontas that are slightly more accurate than the previously mentioned images (see Appendix I, images 1-3). However, these portrayals also serve the audience for which they were created. By painting Pocahontas in dresses with fringe and decorated with feathers, she seems more exotic and foreign. Placing the girl in the woods makes her life more dangerous and enchanting. It also shows her assumed kindness towards helpless animals. These images show a romanticized version of Pocahontas' life and viewers are more inclined to believe that she was the heroic Indian princess of which the famous legend speaks.

All of these portraits from the nineteenth century soften and romanticize Pocahontas into merely a girl who looks attractive as she roams about the forest. The upper class white women viewing these images would have had the soft and ample figures, as it was a sign that they had servants and slaves to do their household chores. By depicting Pocahontas in the same way, it gives her and her role in American history more importance, showing that the Native American would conform to fit modern values of white Americans.

Pocahontas and John Smith

In contrast to the portraits, nineteenth century artists used the legend of Pocahontas and John Smith to show the dangers of Native Americans. The artists illustrated the natives as savages who had no problem killing an innocent European man with brute force. All of these images portray Pocahontas as a savior to John Smith, and therefore the Europeans. She is more closely associated with Europeans, as well, because of her pale skin and European clothing.

Numerous images can be found from the nineteenth century that depict the legendary act of Pocahontas saving John Smith's life (see Appendix I, images 15-24). These are full of stereotypical Native American imagery. The Powhatan men have dark brown or red skin and their mostly naked bodies are sometimes painted. The clothing they do wear consists of

decorated cloth robes, deer skin garments, feathered skirts, feathered headdresses, and necklaces made of feathers and beads. One image shows two men with jaguar skins draped around their bodies (see Appendix I, image 21). A white horse with a red hand print painted on his hind quarters makes an appearance in one scene (see Appendix I, image 16). The Native American men are ready to kill Smith with spears, tomahawks, arrows, and clubs. Teepees, which the native Virginians did not have in reality, can be seen in the background of images 16 and 20.

Many of these images place a sharp contrast between Pocahontas and her Native American counterparts. The male Powhatans have dark brown or reddish skin, while Pocahontas and Smith have pale complexions (see Appendix I, images 16, 18, 19, 22, 24). This color distinction clearly separates the men from Smith and Pocahontas. The two parties are also separated spatially in some scenes (see Appendix I, images 16, 19, 21-24). The physical distance identifies the two sides of the struggle, Native American and European, and Pocahontas chose the European side. Pocahontas is also disconnected from her people by the way she dresses. Some artists drew the young woman in European dresses and shoes (see Appendix I, images 18, 19, 22, 24). In these images she looks like she came to the New World with Smith rather than being a member of the Powhatan tribe.

All images depicting the John Smith story I examined from this century show a dramatic, dangerous scene unfolding in Virginia. The Powhatan men have their arms raised, with fierce looks on their faces as they raise their weapons, ready to kill Smith. Smith often lies on the ground (see Appendix I, images 17-22, 23), and is also depicted kneeling over a rock (see Appendix I, images 15, 16, 22). Pocahontas is flung across Smith's body and raises her hands pleadingly to stop the attack. She and Smith have intense and frightened looks upon their faces. "Pocahontas Saving the Life of Captain John Smith," painted by John Gadsby Chapman in 1836,

takes place inside a structure, around a fire producing a large amount of smoke (see Appendix I, image 15). The white smoke creates an ominous setting against the dark interior of the structure. Francis Davis painted the scene in 1872 and gave three Powhatans and Pocahontas bright red skin (see Appendix I, image 21). War paint covers the men, as well as jaguar skins, as they descend on John Smith. The men's bright red skin significantly adds to the drama of the scene, as Davis uses this to create a stereotypical savage image.

According to the story that nineteenth century viewers were told, Pocahontas defies her own father and people by saving John Smith's life. Images of Pocahontas saving Smith during this time portray her as a young woman, not a girl, who would give her own life to protect Smith, a white man. The artists visually align her with the Europeans by giving her pale skin and nonnative clothing.

Pocahontas and John Rolfe

Scenes painted in the nineteenth century in which Pocahontas and John Rolfe are together, promote the idea that Native Americans can be civilized and integrated into American society. Pocahontas shines as a success story in the long history of troubled relations between and people native to America. She converted to Christianity, had a child with her husband and adopted to the lifestyle of a European woman when she traveled to England. In these images, Pocahontas always appears much smaller and younger than Rolfe. This makes the relationship appear more fatherly than romantic. Pocahontas represents the Native American population while Rolfe represents the United States government.

Around 1868, an image of Pocahontas and John Rolfe's marriage was reproduced on a jigsaw puzzle made of wooden blocks (see Appendix I, image 10). In the image, Pocahontas looks like a small, European child. Her skin is white, she has short light brown hair and her

features are plump. She appears to be wearing a mixture of Powhatan and European clothing: a skirt made of feathers, moccasins, and a shirt and cape made of cloth. She also wears fluffy feathers in her hair. Another scene from Pocahontas' wedding shows many Englishmen and a few Native Americans gathered around the couple (see Appendix I, image 11). Pocahontas' skin is slightly darker than Rolfe's pale complexion. She has black hair and her dress is made of colorful cloth.

In James William Glass' "John Rolfe and Pocahontas," he paints the couple sitting together on a couch (see Appendix I, image 12). Rolfe has his hand placed strategically next to a crucifix. This reminds viewers that Christianity is important, and spreads the message that it is possible to convert indigenous people in America. Pocahontas looks much younger than Rolfe and she does look more Native American than him. Her skin is slightly darker and she has black hair. Her dress is a cloth fabric. More Christian influences are shown in two images from this time depicting Pocahontas' baptism (see Appendix I, images 13 and 14). She has relatively dark skin and is kneeling in front of an alter wearing a long, cloth dress. In the first image she is surrounded by many white settlers and a few Native Americans, while in the other only a handful of Englishmen are present.

The nineteenth century portrayals of Pocahontas and John Rolfe promote the idea that the government is a fatherly figure to the Native Americans, and should dictate what they can and cannot do. This gives viewers justification of the Indian Removal Act signed shortly before these images were created. By placing Pocahontas in white European settings with Rolfe, it conveys that it is in the interest of both groups if the Native Americans behave as the government wants. If all Native Americans conform to the white majority society, as Pocahontas did, they will be content.

Pocahontas in Advertising

Through the years, Pocahontas' image has been used as the face for Virginia tobacco products. She helped the men at Jamestown survive and brought a few years of peace between the Englishmen and Native Americans. She also married John Rolfe, who was instrumental in growing tobacco in Jamestown. Because of her history with Virginia, Pocahontas is used as a historical figure to sell products containing tobacco, which the Encyclopedia Virginia calls "colonial Virginia's most successful cash crop" ("Tobacco in Colonial Virginia"). She is placed in the ads as a hero for the Virginia tobacco industry.

In 1889, Virginia Cigarette Company Cameron and Sizer placed a colorful card within its cigarette packs (see Appendix I, image 25). The card shows Pocahontas trying to save John Smith as a man stands over them with a club. Above this scene the card contains an image reproduced from de Passe's engraving, with Pocahontas wearing English clothing. The Patterson Bros. Tobacco Corp., also based in Virginia, used the same images on their Matoaka cigarette packages produced in the 1920s. Harris, Beebe & Co. also used Pocahontas for the sale of tobacco (see Appendix I, image 26). She was featured on their 1868 ad for chewing tobacco, posing in front of a river wearing a feathered skirt, feather headdress, metal jewelry and a shirt that covers one breast. In 1860, the Powhatan Brand featured a scene from the Pocahontas–Smith story on an advertisement for their tobacco (see Appendix I, image 27). Pocahontas wears a bright blue English dress and a feathered head band as she pleads for Smith's life.

Arbuckle Bros. Coffee Company of New York put illustrated cards in their packages of coffee in the late nineteenth century (see Appendix I, image 28). One side contained images while the other gave a description of the pictures. Among others, they produced a card representing the history of each state. Pocahontas and John Smith are pictured in one of several

drawings on Virginia's card, released in 1892. A pale Pocahontas cradles Smith's head while two Native Americans wearing loin cloths and covered in paint threaten to club the pair. In 1907, the United States Postal Service issued five cent stamps with Pocahontas' image commemorating the tricentennial of the founding of Jamestown (see Appendix I, image 29). The stamp used de Passe's engraving of Pocahontas, showing her as an English woman. Also released in 1907 for the tricentennial was a coin with the Powhatan's image (see Appendix I, image 30). Although it is difficult to see, the coin features only a rendering of her head and she appears to have a feather in her hair.

The coffee card, stamp, and coin remind consumers that Pocahontas played a significant role in Virginia's colonial history. The images have little to do with Pocahontas' physical appearance and instead bring attention to her actions in the early seventeenth century. She is removed from her native environment and shown to be a friend to the English. By reproducing Pocahontas' likeness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she is now a symbol of American history as a whole.

Representations from 1900-2014

As the United States moved into the twentieth century, the image of Pocahontas gradually reverted back to that of a Native American. The PBS website for the Pocahontas Nova episode includes a painting of Pocahontas by Mary Ellen Howe. PBS believes Howe's 1994 painting "may be the most accurate portrait of Pocahontas that can be painted" ("Images of a Legend"). Her representation is very similar to de

Mary Ellen Howe, "Pocahontas," 1994

Passe's 1616 image, the only known rendering of Pocahontas from life, as she realized the Dutch engraver accurately depicted the Powhatan's facial features. Howe studied the facial structures of modern Virginia Native Americans and decided that de Passe was correct when he engraved Pocahontas with an overbite, dimpled chin, and high cheekbones. While creating her painting, the artist also noted skin tones of three tribes that have remained in Virginia from the time of European contact. She modeled Pocahontas' fairly light skin color from the Pamunkey, Mattoponi, and Rappahannock Native Americans. Howe added brilliant white, bright red, and muted gold to the European clothing and hat Pocahontas is wearing. Because of the research Howe conducted, her painting of Pocahontas is thought to be more realistic than most of it's predecessors.

One year after the release of Howe's painting, Disney's animated movie *Pocahontas* was released in theaters. Young girls instantly began to idolize the newest Disney princess. The movie portrays a strong, courageous young woman who consults with a talking willow tree for spiritual guidance, and loves and respects the natural world around her. When she travels in the woods, she is followed by a hummingbird and a raccoon, and at one point picks up a bear cub and cuddles it in front of its mother. The animated Pocahontas is beautiful with a slim figure, long black hair, plump red lips, almond shaped eyes and light brown skin. She wears a fringed deer skin dress, a blue necklace, bare feet, and a tattoo on one arm. Men and women Powhatan are shown with tattoos, long dark

Still from Disney's *Pocahontas*, www.imdb.com

hair often worn in braids, raccoon and deer skin clothing, jewelry, and feathers in their hair. *Pocahontas* also shows the tribe gathered around a large fire as a shaman sees the English harming Native Americans within the smoke from the fire. Natives are often paddling canoes in the river.

Pocahontas tells the story of the young woman at the time Englishmen first arrive on the Powhatan's land in the New World, which they immediately declare Jamestown. Pocahontas is a free spirited adult in her late teens or early twenties. She meets John Smith in the woods shortly after he arrives in Virginia, and he soon learns Native Americans are not as uncivilized and "savage" as the English think. The couple fall in love and try to bring peace between their people. However, Smith is captured by the Powhatans and is about to be executed when Pocahontas falls over his body, persuading her father to spare the man's life because of their love. Powhatan commends his daughter for her bravery in standing up to her people, and lets Smith live.

Disney's version of Pocahontas' life is flawed in many of the same ways earlier paintings and the popular legend of Pocahontas and John Smith are. *Pocahontas* gives viewers an unrealistic parable of the young hero. Forbidden love and an idealistic essence of Native American life are messages that take precedence over the courageous peacekeeping Pocahontas was known for. Pocahontas is presented as a hero; however, she acts out of love in *Pocahontas* rather than the ritualistic reason historians now believe to be true. The movie serves to familiarize young viewers with a general sense of Native American culture, as well as give them a happy, romantic moviegoing experience. Because the audience for the movie is so young, Disney forces a simplistic and stereotypical representation of a Native American tribe and Pocahontas' story.

Conclusion

Towards the end of Pocahontas' life, her image was used as a promotional tool for the Virginia Company to persuade Europeans to settle in the New World. Simon de van Passe created the only image of the Native American taken from life while Pocahontas was visiting England. The image shows her in English attire, which bears no significance to her Powhatan ancestry. Through the middle of the nineteenth century, artists continued to distance the young woman from her homeland to remove her from her native cultural features. They softened and rounded her physical features, lightened her skin, and continued to paint her in European clothing. All of these images show viewers that Pocahontas was a Native American who posed no threat to white settlers. They also prove that Native Americans could be colonized, converted to Christianity, and stripped of their native culture.

During the nineteenth century, Pocahontas' image was also used as promotion for numerous tobacco companies. By including the Native American on their packaging, the companies added historical value to their product. They associated Pocahontas with Jamestown and John Rolfe, who was instrumental in creating the tobacco industry in the New World. These marketing campaigns portray the Powhatan in her native setting, adding a feeling of nostalgia and credibility to the products.

Mary Ellen Howe's 1994 portrait "Pocahontas" is one of the most accurate portrayals from any century because she studied the facial structures of modern day Virginia Native Americans. This allowed the artist to see how descendants of Pocahontas' culture look today and helped her determine how that would translate several generations prior. Howe's portrait looks exceptionally similar to de Passe's engraving, insinuating he sketched Pocahontas as she truly appeared in 1616.

Disney's *Pocahontas* dominates previous portrayals and will forever solidify her role as a heroic princess to the ensuing generations of young Disney watchers. The film is full of romantic representations of Native American life as Pocahontas frolics through the forest, hugging a bear cub and conversing with a tree. Pocahontas does try to bring peace between the Powhatans and English in the movie, however, she saves John Smith because of their love for each other. Disney will forever perpetuate this inaccurate version of the seventeenth century incident.

As idealistic individuals, we want to hold on to the story of Pocahontas as a glorious hero, whose strength and gumption created peace between two very different peoples, if only for a few short years. This version of Pocahontas is optimistic, romantic, and legendary. Her story gives us hope that brave and miraculous things can happen when we are willing to fight for what we believe. However, the tangible portrayals of Pocahontas presented to American audiences undermine this courage by using her as propaganda for white objectives.

Since her death, Pocahontas has been treated as a "good Indian." She is a figure who has been accepted by Americans and even respected as a hero in our nation's history. Because she helped the white settlers of our nation–by giving them food, saving Smith's life, and trying to create peace–Pocahontas is admired and honored. However, she went even further by showing everyone that she could be like white people. She converted to Christianity, married an Englishman and had a child with him. For four centuries Euro-Americans have taken this heroic view of Pocahontas and translated it to visual mediums. The result is four hundred years of images that show how Native Americans can be colonized, subdued, and Americanized. From the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, Pocahontas imagery Americans are presented highlight English attempts to control Native Americans, instead of celebrate the valiant actions Pocahontas took to create peace between two very different nations.

Appendix I

Image 1

Rice, Daniel, and James Clark, "Pocahontas," 1842

Image 2

Sully, Thomas. "Pocahontas." 1852

Image 3

Sully, Robert Matthew, "Pocahontas," c. 1852

Image 4

Steele, Joel Dorman, *A Popular History of the United States of America*, 1875

Image 5

Buttre, J. C., "Pocahontas," 1885

Image 6

Staal, Charles, engraved by B. Eyles. "Pocahontas," 1857

Image 7

Sully, Robert Matthew, "Pocahontas," c. 1850

Image 8

Weir and Darley, "The Chieftain's Daughter," 1853

Image 9

Mozier, Joseph, "Pocahontas," c. 1854

Image 10

S. L. Hill (manufacturer), "Marriage of Pocahontas & Rolfe," c. 1868

Image 11

Brueckner, Henry, "The Marriage of Pocahontas," 1855

Image 12

Glass, James William, "John Rolfe and Pocahontas," c. 1850

Image 13

Chapman, John Gadsby, "The Baptism of Pocahontas," 1836-40

Image 14

Darley, Felix O. C., *Our Country: A Household History of the United States*, 1895

Image 15

Chapman, John Gadsby, "Pocahontas Saving the Life of Captain John Smith," 1836

Image 16

Inger, Christian,"Smith Rescued by Pocahontas," 1870

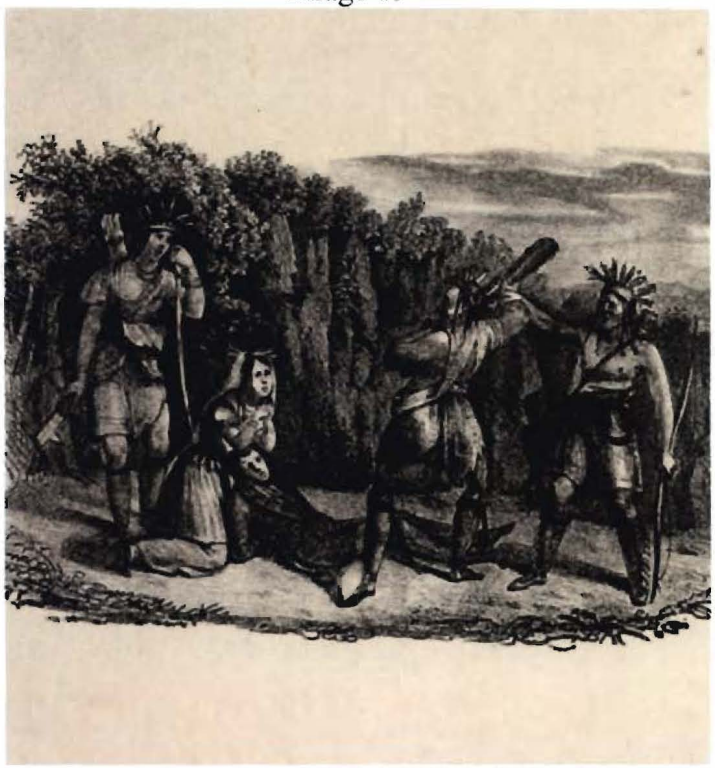
Image 17

Capellano, Antonio, "Preservation of Captain Smith by Pocahontas," 1825

Image 18

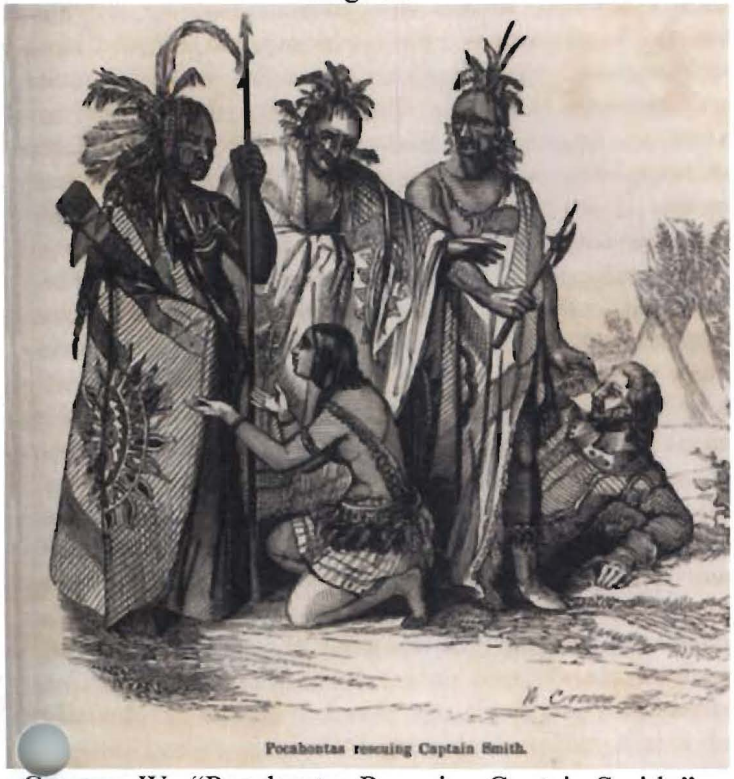
Lilly, Lambert, *The Early History of the Southern States: Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia*, 1832

Image 19



Dielman, Henry, *Pocahontas Grand March*, 1836

Image 20

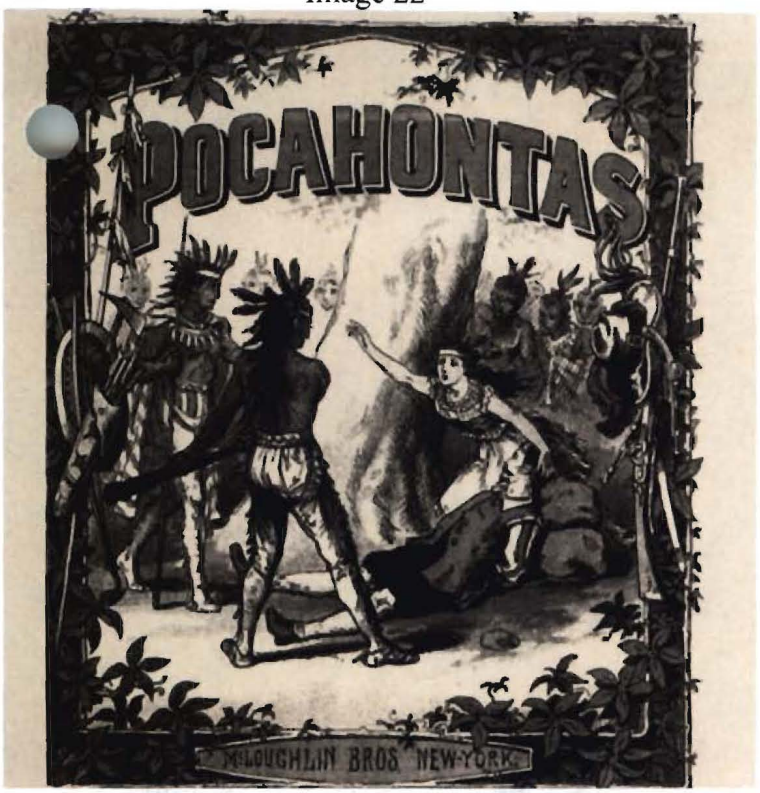


Croome, W., "Pocahontas Rescuing Captain Smith," 1843

Image 21

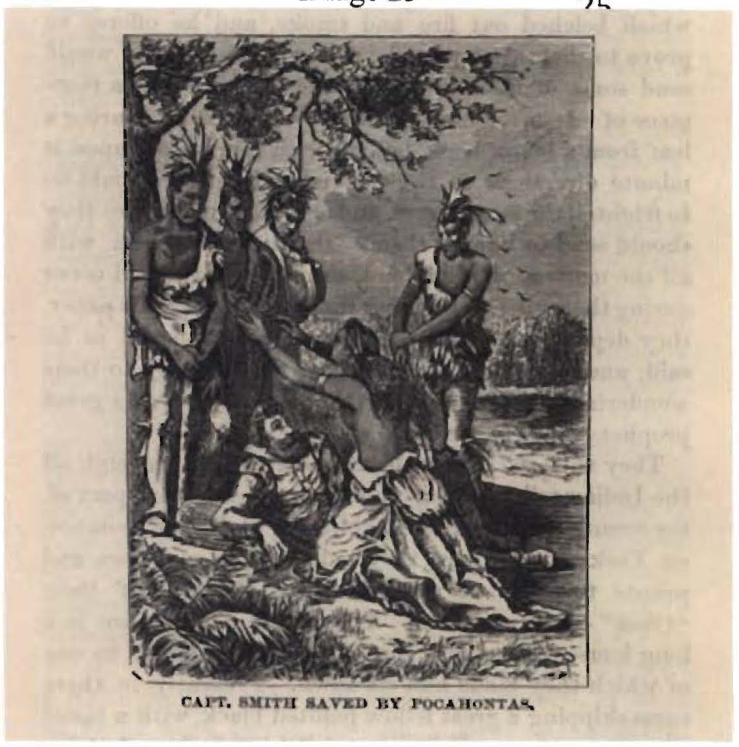
Davis, Francis, "Pocahontas Saveth ye Lyfe of Captaine Smithe," 1872

Image 22



Pryor, Paul, "The Indian Maiden," 1873

Image 23



Magill, Mary Tucker, "Capt. Smith Saved by Pocahontas," 1873

Image 24

Cooke, John Esten, "The Adventures of Captain John Smith." 1879

Image 25

Cameron & Sizer's cigarette advertisement, 1889

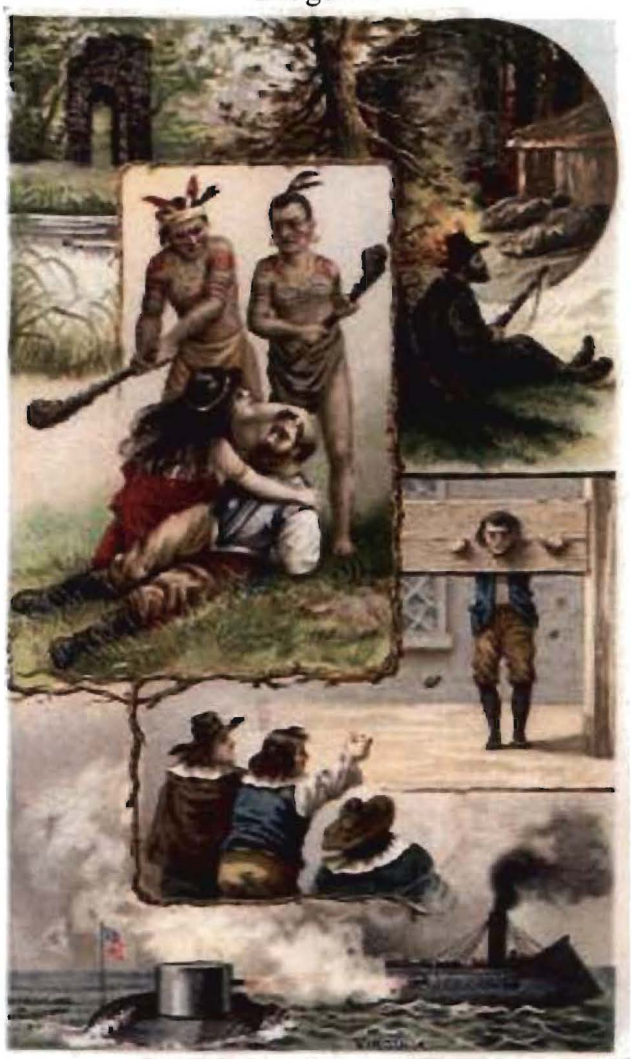
Image 26

Harris, Beebe & Co. chewing tobacco advertisement, 1868

Image 27

Powhatan Brand tobacco advertisement, 1860

Image 28



Arbuckle Bros. Coffee Company coffee advertisement, 1892

Image 29

United States Postal Service stamp, 1907

Image 30

Jamestown tricentennial coin, 1907

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